



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

### 2019 EU Ambassadors' Conference

*Brussels, 2 September 2019*

#### Thematic session: "Reality-check: the bi-lateralisation of multilateralism and the rules based order"

#### OSCE Secretary General, Thomas Greminger

*Dear Colleagues,*

- Thank you for inviting me to take part in this session. My presence here shows how close our relationship has become.
- **Let me start with a quote:** *The OSCE as a Europe-wide organisation stretching into Central Asia with a transatlantic link, lies at the heart of the European security order. The EU will strengthen its contribution within and its cooperation with the OSCE as a pillar of European security*". This is, of course, from the **EU's 2016 Global Strategy and I am happy to say that progress has been made.**
- Last year's **Exchange of Letters** between the EEAS, the Commission and the OSCE underscored our commitment to work towards further synergies. **Regular consultations are taking place at all levels.** Some of you will have participated in **OSCE Regional Heads of Mission meetings** in Central Asia and South-East Europe. The next, by the way, will be held in Pristina at the end of the month.
- For good reasons, EU Member states are among the pS with the strongest attachment to multilateral institutions. And the EU is a **key partner for the OSCE in defending multilateralism in wider Europe.**
- I have to admit that to multilateralists like me, "**bilateralising**" **the multilateral sounds somewhat threatening at first.** But I find it very encouraging that you are dedicating this entire first session to an exchange on **ways to strengthen multilateralism through the work of EU Delegations around the world.**

### No alternative to multilateralism

- **There is no doubt that multilateral institutions**, and even multilateralism as a concept, have **come under considerable fire lately**.
- Some of the **world's most prominent leaders** now openly display **distrust in international institutions; oppose international governance**; and are increasingly tempted to take **unilateral and often confrontational approaches** to foreign relations.
- This is problematic because **multilateral systems depend on commonly accepted norms and behaviour**. They are built on predictability and trust, and the reasonable expectation that commitments will be honoured. **A free-for-all would quickly end in chaos**.
- Today, **many security challenges defy borders. Terrorism and violent extremism. Cyber threats. Climate change**. Large flows of migrants. **Trafficking in drugs, arms and people**.
- Even the **richest and strongest States** cannot tackle these threats on their own.
- And **rapid technological change** adds further uncertainty.
- So bilateral approaches will only get you so far. **“Me first” if it means “me at the expense of others”** is not going to work. Certainly not in the long-run. I hope that advocates of “exclusive bilateral deals” will realize this sooner rather than later. They need to understand that their own interests will be jeopardized when others take the same approach.

### Current difficulties

- Admittedly, **promoting the value of multilateralism in the current context is not easy, in the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian region as elsewhere in the world**.
- **Fundamental principles have been violated**.
- **Arms control regimes are unravelling** and competition has emerged in new spheres. We see the **weaponization of almost everything** – from trade, to migration, to information.
- The result is a breakdown in trust. Trust in governments. Trust in multilateral institutions. Trust in the media. And, of course, trust between states.
- And so we end up in the paradoxical situation that **support for co-operation is shrinking just when it is needed most**.

## The role of the OSCE

- Clearly, it is **not altruism** that leads states to co-operate. States will co-operate only when they believe that it is in their best interest.
- Sometimes, co-operation re-emerges out of crisis.
- Let's briefly consider the **crisis in and around Ukraine**. Here, the main interested parties in 2014 quickly realised that the OSCE was the organization best-suited for an international response. **Inclusive and flexible, the OSCE managed to deploy an unarmed civilian mission in record time.**
- Today, the **situation remains far from resolved** but the OSCE presence is using **every opportunity to help stabilize the ceasefire and improve the dire humanitarian situation** on the ground.
- The last recommitment to the ceasefire continues to have a **positive impact on the security situation**; ceasefire violations have been significantly reduced (more than 75 per cent lower). Only one civilian casualty was reported in the last month. This shows that the sides **can take small steps towards stabilizing the security situation on the ground**. The proposed Normandy Summit could build further momentum by sending out strong political signals.
- So, in moments of crisis, states are quite **happy to fall back on multilateral organizations such as the OSCE**. But that is only possible because many years of co-operation preceded that crisis moment and prepared the ground, including 25 years of OSCE experience with running field operations.
- At all times, we need to highlight **the benefits of co-operation** but also **the costs of not co-operating**.
- As a multilateral forum, the OSCE has the flexibility, tools and expertise to be a **robust force for stability and peace**. But first we need to **revive a culture of co-operation**, if we want to use this potential.
- Let me give you two examples of how we, at the OSCE, are trying to do that.
- First, the **Structured Dialogue we initiated two years ago**. This inclusive and informal dialogue platform **aims to reverse negative trends undermining Europe's arms control and security architecture**. It is in itself also an important **confidence-building measure**.
- Meanwhile, the Structured Dialogue has considered **threat perceptions, military doctrines, force postures, military exercises and deployments**.

- **Reducing military risks is a critical priority** given the potential for tensions in the Baltics or Black Sea regions.
- A major **mapping exercise** has started to establish a common data-set of military forces and exercises. This will establish a **factual basis as a starting point for further discussions**. As a side-effect, this exercise **is already enhancing military-to-military contacts and helping to build confidence**.
- This year, the main focus is on **risk reduction, incident prevention, and transparency**. In time, this effort could lead to a multilateral code of conduct on incident prevention and management – though we are still quite away from such an outcome.
- Second example: **cyber/ICT confidence-building measures** as a way to deal with a major new risk factor for interstate conflict.
- All 57 OSCE pS have agreed to **16 ground-breaking cyber/ICT security CBMs**. They aim to **enhance transparency and predictability** by **reducing the risk of misperception and miscalculation** associated with the use of ICTs by states.
- In this case, the OSCE is also acting as **a catalyst by inspiring discussions on cybersecurity in other regions and at the UN**.
- Speaking of the UN, we are taking steps to **update our partnership with the UN**. Our **links are multiple** and reach into most areas of our engagement, from our conflict cycle and questions of disarmament all the way to women, peace and security, gender equality more broadly, and the protection of human rights.
- The OSCE sees itself as a **regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter**. Peace and security are terms that have been redefined in recent years. Increasingly, the **2030 Agenda is becoming a significant reference framework** for us. We are mapping our activities and finding that our programmes are contributing to the SDGs, chiefly SDG 16, in many different ways.
- We also see **potential in bridging the global and the national levels through regional initiatives** for awareness-raising and the sharing of best practices for SDG implementation. Perhaps, joint initiatives with the EU in this area could become a future focus of our partnership.

### Conclusion

- But let me conclude by affirming the assertion made in the EU's Global Strategy: "*The OSCE lies at the heart of Europe's security order.*"

- As a multilateral **platform for inclusive dialogue and building trust** the OSCE offers important **opportunities for strengthening security in Europe**. But we must make sure it is utilized to better effect.
- Too often, the **emphasis is on public diplomacy that reinforces an antagonistic zero-sum relationship**. Instead, we need **genuine dialogue and initiatives that manage to establish common ground** and to slowly get us out of the current security impasse.
- **Key stakeholders set the example** in the OSCE as elsewhere. They have the ability to change the tone of our debates. To take steps to reduce tensions and rebuild trust.
- The **EU, collectively, and through its Member states** has a key role to play. Its commitment to strengthening multilateralism world-wide should remain highly tangible inside the OSCE.
- The EU's **political impetus for multilateral problem-solving and the financial muscle it can bring to bear can make a big difference**, in Vienna and throughout the OSCE area.